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My Friend O. Henry

By
SETH MOYLE

NEW YORK
THE H. K. FLY COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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SETH MOYLE

IN APPRECIATION

To Larry Evans —

Like O. Henry and "Good-Heart Taylor," when my need was great, it was your re-assuring hand-clasp, stretched out afar from the desolation of wintry Saranac Lake to selfish, pitiless Gotham, that restored confidence and helped set right many things that were radically wrong.

Despite this age of sordid commercialism, all sentiment is not dead and now and then we see evidences of appreciation of goodness and a kind act unselfishly rendered.

It is this spirit which has prompted my dedication to you and your work, of this little volume with its many intimacies of a privileged affectionate association for many years with the Master himself.

And to —

Gilman Hall, Archie Sessions, Bob Davis, Bill Johnston, Mrs. Wilson Woodrow, Anne Partlan, Roland Phillips, Bob MacCulloch, and the fine little woman who, on bended knees, in "The Little Church Around The Corner" on that memorable day in June paid her silent tribute through prayer, to the memory of O. Henry, I tender grateful acknowledgment.

These friends have indeed made possible this booklet.

MY FRIEND O. HENRY

SO I went to a doctor.

"'How long has it been since you took any alcohol into your system?' he asked.

"Turning my head sidewise, I answered, 'Oh, quite a while.'

"He was a young doctor, somewhere between twenty and forty. He wore heliotrope socks, but he looked like Napoleon. I liked him immensely. He bared my left arm to the elbow, brought out a bottle of whiskey, and gave me a drink. He began to look more like Napoleon. I began to like him better."

Could anything better typify the master-pen than this, his satirical, philosophical "Swan Song," as published in the "Cosmopolitan Magazine"—a humorous review, from a man brought face to face with the inevitable end, of his own "Adventures In Neurasthenia"?

Read the story. I was with him—a dying man—through the entire writing of it, and through the writing of many others.

And be informed.

The "prescription" amulet he really wore.

The incidents at "the retreat," from which he retreated precipitately, did occur.

The co-ordination tests all were true.

"Did you ever hear a silence," was the basic theme. A return to Manhattan, with its cling-clang and moaning of the cars, with its rumble of elevated trains and shrieks of automobile sirens—*for absolute rest and exercise*—that was to have been the climax.

There was to be no girl.

Roland Phillips, who ordered the story, and the encyclopedia, are responsible for "Amarylis."

(Incidentally, it is too bad there were not more such appreciative-in-the-$-&-c-way editors in the Master's lifetime. If there had been, many dreams would have been realized by him, many hearts would have been made glad, the world would have been better for it all, and O. Henry would have lived longer to communicate some of the really great messages that died with him.)

It was due to Gilman Hall and Richard Duffy, co-editors at "Ainslee's" that O. Henry came to New York, and they had most to do with encouraging him in his work. Certainly no friend was closer to him than Gilman Hall, and it was for him he sent when on his death-bed, Gilman Hall, now associate editor of "Everybody's Magazine," a man, who, indeed in kindliness and fair treatment of his fellowmen, reflects O. Henry himself.

So much has been written about Sydney Porter that it would seem useless to add more. But here are some anecdotes, some original MSS., and some little sidelights that thus far have escaped public notice. As a preface to them, and for those who are not as familiar with his history as others, I quote from Archie Sessions' estimate of him printed in the August "Ainslee's," just following his death.

"The death of Sydney Porter, who was known to the readers of 'Ainslee's' as O. Henry, has ended a career which, beginning in this magazine nine years ago, brought him distinction achieved by only a chosen few.

"The relations maintained between O. Henry and 'Ainslee's' from the date of the acceptance of his first story in February, 1901, up to the time of his death, were such as to render it impossible for us to allow the event to pass without something more than the ordinary obituary notice.

"He himself fully participated in the sentiment which was the foundation of these relations, and frequently expressed the feeling which bound him to this magazine as the medium through which his first stories were given to the public. In a letter written shortly before his death, he referred to 'the old magazine' in terms which showed the sincerity and depth of his feeling.

"'Ainslee's' has, therefore, had a certain pride in the fame of O. Henry, a pride which his modesty led him to deprecate while he good-naturedly surrendered to it.

"His first story was 'Money Maze,' and it appeared in 'Ainslee's Magazine' for May, 1901. It attracted immediate attention, and stimulated the curiosity of various publishers who promptly made inquiries of the editor of the magazine, as to the identity of 'O.

Henry.' As he was absolutely unknown at the time, the facts in the case may serve to correct the impression so often and so confidently expressed, that unknown authors and beginners have little chance with editors. In the course of the year which followed he wrote a number of short stories, which appeared in 'Ainslee's,' including 'Rouge et Noir,' 'The Flag Paramount,' 'The Passing of Black Eagle,' and 'Friends in San Rosario,' all of which showed unmistakably the extraordinary quality of his gift. Besides this, he made attempts at writing a novel and a four-part story, of which he submitted scenarios. But these attempts, which came to nothing, brought the conviction, always thereafter tenaciously held by him, that his forte was the short story, and not the novel. 'Cabbages and Kings,' the only other experiment of the kind he ever made, was not, strictly speaking, a long story, but merely the reprint of several short tales of a uniform type.

"A few of his stories were published in 'Ainslee's' under the names of James L. Bliss and S. H. Peters, notably 'The Robe of Peace' and 'While the Auto Waits,' two of the most delicious and perfect bits of fiction that he ever wrote, but which his subsequent fame as the prophet of 'The Four Million' has, unfortunately, more or less obscured.

"The reputation made for him by these early tales inevitably created a widespread demand for his work among other publishers and editors, but his loyalty to 'Ainslee's' never wavered, and he continued to contribute much of his best to this magazine. 'Blind Man's Holiday,' 'The Memento,' and 'Compliments of the Season' being among the later ones.

"That O. Henry was a man of genius is beyond all question. Those who knew him and were familiar with his methods of work had proofs of it in addition to that furnished by his printed stories.

"Distinguished and disinterested critics have compared O. Henry to Maupassant. But the comparison is unnecessary and unjust to both. The glory of genius is that it is eternally original and new, and the fame of both must rest upon the fact that they were vitally and fundamentally different, not only each from the other, but from every other master of fiction and for all time."

His loyalty to the editors of "Ainslee's" reflected his greatest characteristic. It was a wonderful thing, this loyalty and devotion. Greater love had no man for his fellowmen.

QUITE in keeping with "The Adventures in Neurasthenia" mood were his last words, as he realized that he was passing into the Great Beyond—"Prop up the pillows, pull up the blinds, 'I'm Afraid To Go Home in the Dark.'"

And, too, his remarks to me when we discussed the inevitable end, some few months before it came. With a shrug of the shoulders and a whimsical smile, he exclaimed, "Well, I guess it will take place 'In the Good Old Summer Time.'"

One of the most amusing incidents of our association took place one night at "Allaire's Sheffel Hall." My apartment was located on 17th Street near Irving Place opposite this old-time German restaurant. To this place and to "Still's" just around the corner, O. Henry loved to go.

It was not unusual, in the "wee sma' hours" of the morning to receive a telephone call at this 17th Street apartment. The vibration of the voice instantly reflected the lonesomeness of the genius.

"Are you there?" he would inquire.

"Well, I'm here."

"Is this you?"

"Well, this is me."

"I'm coming right over."

And a minute later the door-bell would ring and O. Henry, who had been telephoning from the public hall and not from his own apartment (a couple of miles away), would announce himself.

This was his quaint way of doing things and it was in some such mood that he visited Sheffel Hall on the following occasion.

Gathered in our little party at the time was a most celebrated alienist, an equally celebrated criminal lawyer, Charles Somerville, journalist, Gilpin, V. C., and a few other celebrities. For some time, in anticipation of meeting O. Henry, the venerable Doctor had been carrying around with him two volumes of the

author's works — for impressionistic purposes. (Those "in the know" will appreciate how unfortunate this was.)

Having a reputation as a humorist, the Doctor expected O. Henry to sustain it with some funny anecdotes, a thing, because of his reticence, he seldom did.

Modest, diffident, shy, he was the last man to take the center of the stage or to mix where hero-worshipping prevailed.

On this occasion he probably felt as did Chopin, who after dining, was repeatedly urged by his host to play.

"Ah," said he, with supreme sarcasm, "having partaken of your food I must now pay with play."

Doubtless this was the mind-state of O. Henry, and his sense of humor led him to "feed" the Doctor and others the worst line of "chestnuts" I ever have heard.

"Why does a chicken cross the road," (with an impressive pause) *"hurriedly?"* he inquired, with great seriousness.

"To get out of the way of the automobile," he added, quickly, before anyone could interrupt.

The alienist snorted, the distinguished ladies in the party giggled, the celebrated lawyer beamed a broad Irish grin, Charlie Somerville took another drink and Gilpin, V. C., looked peeved.

A little later, with that gravity that was so characteristic of him, O. Henry remarked,

"I'm afraid, Doctor, that you have made a mistake about my identity," with a steady glance at the two O. Henry volumes prominently displayed on the table. "I am not O. Henry. I am Mark Twain."

And then the Doctor took to Pilsener, to recover his equilibrium, whilst Gilpin, V. C., Charlie Somerville and the impersonator of his only real rival in humor, took their departure and made for "Still's" just across the way.

One evening, at this 17th Street apartment, a young man with considerable pianistic skill was "tearing loose" with his most pretentious offerings to "make an impression" with O. Henry, who had just arrived in person and who had only a short time before "arrived" in public esteem as a humorist and philosopher.

The virtuoso was well launched in the stormiest passage of a Liszt Hungarian Rhapsodie when the author approached him diffidently. Tapping him on the shoulder he whispered sotto voce in his ear, with great satisfaction, "I know what *that* is."

The pianist was flattered and tripled on the fortissimo by way of appreciation.

"Indeed I do. It's an awful lot of noise. Please stop it and play Chopin's Funeral March," which, by the way was the only classical piece I knew him to care for, though he did want to get acquainted with Beethoven.

For quite some time I endeavored to bring together O. Henry and another client of mine, the most celebrated woman fiction realist in America to-day. My best plans failed and it was quite without design that their one and only meeting took place.

The little lady, who had not at that time reached the position of pre-eminence that she now occupies, although even then she was recognized as an author of the greatest possible promise, and I, were lunching at "Colazzi's." In response to a telephone request O. Henry surprised us by coming around the corner from his studio apartment at the Caledonia.

It was not long before the subject of method of work, etc., a favorite theme with the little lady, was well under discussion.

"Do you know," said she, "I just love to get into the heart of things — to really see people and conditions as they are? I can just picture you in a bare hall bedroom, prying curiously out into the night at the dimly-lit rooms across the way, and getting atmosphere. Do tell me just how you go about it?"

Absolutely belying any attempt at humor or sarcasm, O. Henry replied:

"Getting the hall bedroom, cheap boarding-house 'atmosphere' into the pages of your manuscript is simple. You see, I have two very nice quiet little rooms around on 26th Street in an elevator apartment house and there's a restaurant just down stairs. That's convenient.

"When I want 'atmosphere' I telephone down. Soon after,

with paper before me and pencil in hand and with my nostrils inhaling the healthy odor of corned beef and cabbage, I am steeped in boarding-house atmosphere and the story is well on its way."

My lady client gasped her surprise and then we changed the subject.

But when an author friend really needed help with a story I have known O. Henry to stop his own work and devote hours to the service. One incident impressed itself indelibly on my mind. It was a first story and one of considerable promise. Charlie Somerville, who was visiting the author-hostess, was criticising the manuscript when O. Henry arrived. A discussion started which occupied the best part of the afternoon.

Charlie insisted that a certain situation should be handled in an altogether different way. O. Henry pointed out that he would present it from still another angle and give it a decidedly different turn at the end. Finally, the author, who had dinner to get, "shooed" Messrs. Genius out of the apartment, still haggling over the proposition as though it were their own. And, womanlike, she wound up by doing it her way after all. The story sold to "Good Heart Taylor," editor of "The Associated Sunday Magazine," the first market approached, and made a hit. It was called "The Dream Mother."

For a year the best ideas O. Henry ever had were furnished weekly through the "Sunday World" and syndicated throughout the United States. For these stories he received only fifty dollars each. The contract, when renewed, was increased to one hundred dollars each. The same material now would bring from one thousand to fifteen hundred dollars each.

It is a wonder big genial Bill Johnston did not have nervous prostration during the period of delivery of these stories. Many times he telephoned urging for copy only to be assured that the story was on the way. As evidence of good faith O. Henry would give him the title to announce — and then, crowded with many worries, he would forget it. When, at the eleventh hour, Bill would be obliged to insist on the manuscript itself, O. Henry very adroitly would ascertain the title and, over night, turn out a first-

class story written around it. There are several such stories in "The Four Million."

Apropos of this "Sunday World" contract, which had much to do with establishing the reputation of O. Henry, it was Bob Davis, now editor-in-chief of all the Frank A. Munsey publications, who made the arrangement. Commenting on his first meeting he has said:

"The first time I saw this extraordinary man was in 1903. I had been deputized by 'The New York Sunday World' to verify a rumor that he was in New York. After three days' research, I found him on the top floor of the Hotel Marty on West 24th Street. He was seated in his shirt-sleeves by an open window eating Bartlett pears.

"'Come in, Mister,' he said, with a cordial wave of his hand, 'and have a pear. What can I do for you?'

"Without losing any time, I launched into the business. '"The New York World" wants you to do some work for its Sunday edition.'

"'How much do they want to pay for it?'

"I named a price.

"'All right, Mister. Take two pears — take the bag. When do we begin this work?'

"'At once,' I informed him.

"'If that is the case,' he concluded, fanning himself violently, 'wait till I cool off and we will go down-stairs and have something to eat.'

"Regardless of the fact that the weather was ninety in the shade that afternoon, we sat in the dining room of The Marty and consumed a table-d'hôte dinner.

"The next day O. Henry's career began in earnest.

"I saw him frequently thereafter, watched every step in his progress, studied him in all his droll phases, saw him rise to the very height of his fame and talked with him a few days before he passed into immortality.

"The fiction of O. Henry breathes, perchance, in larger proportion than any other single writer, the spirit of our times. He

seemed to comprehend that polyglot population which, for want of a better term, is defined as the American mass. He dug deeply into every human emotion with the point of his quill and swept away with its feather the dust of time. He seems to have occupied the best seat in the world's arena and to have pictured the passing show. None other could have made so indelible a record of the things he saw.

"England has her Dickens, France her Hugo, and America her O. Henry.

"In his books he will live through the ages."

Incidentally, no higher tribute could be paid to any one than the invitation extended Bob Davis above all other people to deliver the memorial address at the unveiling of the O. Henry monument.

Numerous titles were the matter of a moment's impulse with him, as for instance:

"Oh, it's optional so far as title goes — make it 'Options,'" or, "I'm all at 'sixes and sevens' and can't think,— make it 'Sixes and Sevens,'" etc.

It was my privilege to introduce O. Henry to his first game of bowling. We went to an establishment kept by a German who prided himself on the championship form of his alleys.

Taking one of the heaviest balls in both hands O. Henry dropped it with a thud in the middle of the alley. He followed this action with several similar attempts, despite the fact that the purpose of the holes in the ball was explained to him. The proprietor approached, apoplectic with rage. O. Henry anticipated him.

"Look here," said he, "I've a complaint to make. These alleys are not true." And he dropped another ball in the center that raised the proprietor an inch or two off his feet. "See," he continued, "that curved to the left into the gutter. Now watch this one." And he dropped another, which, too, failed to reach the pins. "That turned to the right. This is no place for us to bowl. We'll get out of here."

Needless to add that the proprietor interposed no objection. "Fhricht!" he exclaimed as we passed out and up the stairs.

So we stopped at a shooting gallery. O. Henry was a crack shot, the result perhaps of his Western days. Because of his skill he was not especially welcome in many shooting galleries along Sixth Avenue. He had a habit of breaking everything up that was breakable. This evening he was in poor form and I, who cannot shoot very well, seemed to hit everything I aimed at.

"Come out of here," he said. "Everything's crooked in this town. This place isn't on the level either. That's not a rifle they gave you — they sneaked over a shotgun just to get even with me." And so we proceeded onward for some chop suey.

I DOUBT if anyone knew O. Henry better than Anne Partlan, and she was one of the very few old friends he summoned at the last. I quote from an unpublished reminiscence of hers, the following interesting data:

"'When I read "Among Themselves," I resolved, some day to camp on your territory.'

"O. Henry said this to me when I first met him in New York. The trifle to which he referred was one of a series of sketches which had appeared in the early numbers of 'Success' and had been copied in the 'Dallas Times.' In the months that followed our meeting I was glad to introduce Mr. Porter into the toiling element, of which the sketches had given him some insight.

"There was nothing of the brilliant wit about the great story writer when in the atmosphere of the shop girl, clerk or salesman. Instead, there was a quiet, sympathetic attitude and, at times, a preoccupied manner as if their remarks and chatter reminded him of his old days of bondage in the country drug store, and the perpetual pillmaking which he was wont to describe with an amusing gesture, indicating the process of forming the cure-all.

"One evening a group of department store employees were having dinner with me. Among them were sales girls, an associate buyer and one of the office force. I asked O. Henry to join us so that he might catch the spirit of their daily life. He leavened their shop talk with genial, simple expressions of mirth as they told their tales of petty intrigue and strife for place amid

the antagonism and pressure which pervades the atmosphere of every big organization. On leaving, he remarked to me, 'If Henry James had gone to work in one of those places, he would have turned out the great American novel.'

"On another occasion, the conversation turned to feather curling, and he astonished me with his detailed knowledge of the craft. I asked him where he had learned so much about the work and he told me that in one of his first months in New York he was living in very humble lodgings and one evening found him without funds. He became so hungry that he could not finish the story on which he was working, and he walked up and down the landing between the rooms. The odor of cooking in one of the rooms increased his pangs, and he was beside himself when the door opened and a young girl said to him, 'Have you had your supper? I've made a hazlett stew and it's too much for me. It won't keep, so come and help me eat it.'

"He was grateful for the invitation and partook of the stew, which, she told him, was made from the liver, kidneys and heart of a calf. The girl was a feather curler and, during the meal, she explained her work and showed him the peculiar kind of dull blade which was used in it. A few days later he rapped at her door to ask her to a more substantial dinner, but he found that she had gone and left no address.

"My father, who was an expert mechanic and an inventor of blacksmith's tools, once asked me to accompany him to a convention of master workmen who had gathered from all over the country. On our way to the car we met O. Henry and he asked to join us. When we reached the hall where the men and their wives had assembled, they greeted my father with a great deal of enthusiasm because his tools had greatly simplified their work. O. Henry's attitude during this ovation might have been that of a respectful apprentice.

"Speeches were made by masters of their craft, filled with references to 'side hill plows,' 'bolt cutters,' and 'dressing chisels for rock use.' The speeches referred to the most humane make of horse shoes, bar iron, toe calks, and hoof expanders. All of

this fell on no more attentive ears than O. Henry's. A Scotchman presently arose and spoke on coach building. He told of a wood filling which he once made of the dust gathered from forges, mixed with a peculiar sort of clay. His enunciation was not clear and more than once O. Henry turned to me to ask me if I had caught the indistinct word.

"After the speeches came dancing of the Lancers and the Virginia Reel. O. Henry threw himself into the spirit like a boy. He danced and whistled and called out numbers, laughing heartily when in the maze of a wrong turn. No one there dreamed he was other than a fellow-working man.

"'Where do you keep shop, Mr. Porter?' asked the wife of a Missouri mechanic.

"'Mr. Porter is an author,' I replied impulsively.

"'Well, I can do other things,' he retorted with a note of defense as he continued, 'I can rope cows, and I tried sheep raising once.'

"The chairman of the association asked my father to tell how he came to perfect a hammer which is now used in every forge in the world. When he had finished, the men cheered loudly. O. Henry shook hands with him and said, 'Tom, I would give anything if I were as valuable a man as you are.'

"It occurred to me that he was gathering copy, and I said, half in jest, 'Hands off this territory — it's mine.'

"'I don't blame you,' was his smiling reply.

"When we arrived home it was past two in the morning. My father intended leaving the city on a three o'clock train and O. Henry asked if he might wait and go to the station with him. I made coffee and the two men talked until train time. Mechanics and metallurgy were the subjects. O. Henry asked discriminating questions which revealed his amazing power to absorb a vast and unknown theme in the short space of one evening.

"In March, 1910, my father died. A week later O. Henry returned from the South. He, too, was marked for the silent route. He had learned of my loss and called, eager to know how it was with the one who had gone. Did he leave debts, or was he free

from material obligations? Was he resigned? All this interested him. Then suddenly he almost groaned, 'Oh, I don't want to die; I am swamped with obligations.' Then he quieted and asked how my father felt about a hereafter. It was then that he referred to 'The little chickens tapping on their shells,' which has been recorded elsewhere."

As I weave these memories into words, I wonder if artist and artisan who on earth had so much in common, will ever signal to each other in their soaring through the spheres?

"WHAT is a play?" I once asked O. Henry. "A play," said he, "is something that I can't write."

And he proved it, although if he had lived I think he would have been compelled by the call of "The Open Door" to finish it for Liebler & Co.

After the success of "Alias Jimmy Valentine," based on his story "A Retrieved Reformation," George Tyler engaged him to do a comedy. Campbell (Bob) MacCulloch, general manager for the Tyler interests, was elected to keep in personal touch with the "procrastinating author-playwright" and get the play. He spent many months and got everything but "copy." About to give up in despair, he was electrified to receive a 'phone one day from O. Henry.

"Can you come up right now?" he inquired. "I've got something to show you — honest — cross-my-heart. Yes, it's the play. I've really started. Come right up."

And Bob did, all speed, with visions of failure turned into success.

From out of his table-drawer O. Henry produced a solitary yellow page of paper.

"There," said he, "what do you think of *that*!"

On it was written

"Lo — The Poor Indian"
by
O. Henry

It was then that Bob quit and Franklin P. Adams took on the job and finished it.

From that same drawer, when the chase for the elusive promised manuscript became too hot, the famous yellow sheet of paper on which would be written the first page of a new story, often materialized. (I never knew him to make a second copy of any manuscript. It always stood written in hand writing as first drafted and went to the editor in that form.)

"There now, you see I'm on the job, and just to show you that this is for *you,* I'm going to have you write your name on it."

After this operation and a "little Southern hospitality," the editor would leave, content. And another page would be prepared to replace the autographed one.

To my personal knowledge none of these pages ever took the form of a complete manuscript.

In December, 1911, "Everybody's Magazine" made the following announcement:

THE UNPROFITABLE SERVANT

By O. Henry

"This is an unfinished story. It was written in the fall of 1908, and was delivered to us at that time in this incomplete state. Mr. Porter promised to finish it speedily. But he was already ill, and his long, pathetic struggle to write in spite of sickness and mental weariness had begun. Mr. Porter had told us but little about the ending he purposed for the story. He had meant it to be, so far as lay in his power, the definite story of an 'amateur night' in a New York theatre. He repeatedly spoke of his hope to make it so vivid, so atmospheric, so true, that it would be hailed as an authoritative presentment of that well-known institution. He had told us, too, that the finished part of the story was overwritten, and that he planned to condense it a thousand or fifteen hundred words in order to make room for a comprehensive portrayal, occupying perhaps two thousand words, of the night at the theatre. If the part at hand

Asheville N.C.

My Dear Seth.

Story + long letter coming to you in a week or so. I've been down in North Carolina with Neuras Thenia for more than two months. Haven't earned 5 cents since I've been here. Getting better now. Make some allowance for the circumstances. Everything will pull out all right. I may go further up into the mountains for a while. So if you write again address care of Evans Poley or Doubleday Page & Co.

With regards

Sydney Porter

stood untouched, the completed story, he felt, would be out of drawing. With this criticism by the author in mind, the reader should find an additional enjoyment in the story. If Mr. Porter failed even to reach the big scene, he has, nevertheless, given us a story truly O. Henry in quality, full of kindly humor, whimsical and brilliant.

"We should like to have our readers guess how he meant to end the plot. For the conclusion which, in our judgment, is most satisfactory, we shall award a prize of one hundred dollars. The form of the material submitted in competition is not of first importance. It may be a synopsis of the story from the point at which Mr. Porter left it, or it may be an ending written in full. We impose no space limitations, but suggest that it is unlikely a contributor could to advantage exceed the two thousand words which were to have been enough for Mr. Porter. Submitted endings must be in our hands by January 1, 1912. We reserve the right to withhold the award if in our opinion no manuscript offers a suitable conclusion. And, in case of award, if other endings besides the prize-winner are sufficiently interesting as instances of ingenuity, we shall pay for and publish them."

Better than a synopsis are these excerpts from the unfinished story. A careful reading of "The Unprofitable Servant" as published in "Everybody's Magazine," makes it apparent to all that O. Henry referred again and again to "talent" and "genius." In opening the narrative he says:

"I remember (probably as well as you do) having read the parable of the talents. A prominent citizen, about to journey into a far country, first hands over to his servants his goods. To one he gives five talents; to another two; to another one — to every man according to his several ability, as the text has it. There are two versions of this parable, as you well know. There may be more — I do not know.

"When the p. c. returns he requires an accounting. Two servants have put their talents out at usury and gained one hundred per cent.

Good. The unprofitable one simply digs up the talent deposited with him and hands it out on demand. A pattern of behavior for trust companies and banks, surely! In one version we read that he had wrapped it in a napkin and laid it away. But the commentator informs us that the talent mentioned was composed of 750 ounces of silver — about $900 worth. So the chronicler who mentioned the napkin, had either to reduce the amount of the deposit or do a lot of explaining about the size of the napery used in those days. Therefore in his version we note that he uses the word 'pound' instead of 'talent.'

"A pound of silver may very well be laid away — and carried away — in a napkin, as any hotel or restaurant man will tell you.

"But let us get away from our mutton.

"When the returned nobleman finds that the one-talented servant has nothing to hand over except the original fund entrusted to him, he is as angry as J. D. R. would be if some one should hide under his bed and make a noise like an assessment. He orders the unprofitable servant cast into outer darkness, after first taking away his talent and giving it to the one-hundred-per-cent. financier, and breathing strange saws, saying: 'From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.' Which is the same as to say: 'Nothing from nothing leaves nothing.'"

His introduction of the McGowan cousins is typical.

"In New York City to-day there are (estimated) 125,000 living creatures training for the stage. This does not include seals, pigs, dogs, elephants, prize-fighters, Carmens, mind-readers, or Japanese wrestlers. The bulk of them are in the ranks of the Four Millions. Out of this number will survive a thousand.

"One shall inherit Broadway. Sic venit gloria mundi.

"Cliff McGowan and Mac McGowan were cousins. They lived on the West Side and were talented. Singing, dancing, imitations, trick bicycle riding, boxing, German and Irish dialect comedy, and a little sleight-of-hand and balancing of wheat straws and wheel-barrows on the ends of their chins came as easy to them as it is for you to fix your rat so it won't show or to dodge a creditor through the swinging-doors of a well-lighted café. Their conversation was in

sentences so short that they made Kipling's seem as long as court citations.

"Having the temperament, they did no work. Any afternoon you could find them on Eighth Avenue either in front of Spinelli's barber shop, Mike Dugan's place, or the Limerick Hotel, rubbing their forefinger nails with dingy silk handkerchiefs. At any time, if you had happened to be standing, undecisive, near a pool-table, and Cliff and Mac had, casually, as it were, drawn near, mentioning something, disinterestedly, about a game, well, indeed, would it have been for you had you gone your way, unresponsive. Which assertion, carefully considered, is a study in tense, punctuation, and advice to strangers."

And here enters the third character, Del Delano. An extraordinary thing in connection with this story is that there are only three important characters in it. There is no plot and the whole purpose of the manuscript is to lead to the "Amateur Night."

"One night at about eleven o'clock, Del Delano dropped into Mike's place on Eighth Avenue. From that moment, instead of remaining a Place, the café became a Resort. It was as though King Edward had condescended to mingle with ten-spots of a different suit; or Joe Gans had casually strolled in to look over the Tuskegee School; or Mr. Shaw, of England, had accepted an invitation to read selections from 'Rena, the Snow-bird' at an unveiling of the proposed monument to James Owen O'Connor at Chinquapin Falls, Mississippi. In spite of these comparisons, you will have to be told why the patronizing of a third-rate saloon on the West Side by the said Del Delano conferred such a specific honor upon the place.

"Del Delano could not make his feet behave; and so the world paid him $300 a week to see them misconduct themselves on the vaudeville stage.

"You can easily imagine the worshipful agitation of Eighth Avenue whenever Del Delano honored it with a visit after his terpsichorean act.

"Upon Charley, one of the bartenders, both fame and fortune descended simultaneously. He had once been honored by shaking hands with the great Delano at a Seventh Avenue boxing bout. So

with lungs of brass he now cried: 'Hallo, Del, old man; what'll it be?'

"Mike, the proprietor, who was cranking the cash register, heard. On the next day he raised Charley's wages five a week.

"In the back room Mac McGowan was giving a private exhibition of the genius of his feet. A few young men sat at tables looking on critically while they amused themselves seriously with beer. They nodded approval at some new fancy steps of Mac's own invention.

"At the sight of the great Del Delano, the amateur's feet stuttered, blundered, clicked a few times, and ceased to move. The tongues of one's shoes become tied in the presence of the Master. Mac's sallow face took on a slight flush.

"From the uncertain cavity between Del Delano's hat brim and the lapels of his high fur coat collar came a thin puff of cigarette smoke and then a voice.

"'Do that last step over again, kid. And don't hold your arms quite so stiff. Now, then!'

"Once more Mac went through his paces. According to the traditions of the man dancer, his entire being was transformed into mere feet and legs.

"Del Delano retired within his overcoat and hat. In two minutes he emerged and turned his left side to Mac. Then he spoke.

"'You've got a foot movement, kid, like a baby hippopotamus trying to side-step a jab from a humming-bird. And you hold yourself like a truck driver having his picture taken in a Third Avenue photograph gallery. And you haven't got any method or style. And your knees are about as limber as a couple of Yale pass-keys. And you strike the eye as weighing, let us say, 450 pounds while you work.

"'In other words, you're rotten. You can't dance. But I'll tell you one thing you've got. Genius,' said Del Delano. 'Except myself, it's up to you to be the best fancy dancer in the United States, Europe, Asia, and the Colonial possessions of all three. Genius,' repeated the Master—'you've got a talent for genius. I'll take you in hand and put you at the top of the profession. There's room

there for the two of us. You may beat me; but I doubt it. I've got the start and the pull. But at the top is where you belong.'

"'I ought to tell you,' said Mac, after two minutes of pensiveness, 'that my cousin Cliff can beat me dancing. We've always been what you might call pals. If you'd take him up instead of me, now, it might be better. He's invented a lot of steps that I can't cut.'

"'Forget it,' said Delano. 'Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays of every week from now till amateur night, a month off, I'll coach you. I'll make you as good as I am; and nobody could do more for you. I'll put you at the top of the bunch, right where I am. You've got talent. Your style's bum; but you've got the genius. You let me manage it. I'm from the West Side myself, and I'd rather see one of the same gang win out before I would an East-sider, or any of the Flatbush or Hackensack Meadow kind of butt-iners. I'll see that Junius Rollins is present on your Friday night; and if he don't climb over the footlights and offer you fifty a week as a starter, I'll let you draw it down from my own salary every Monday night. Now, am I talking on the level or am I not?'"

And here the reader is led to "Amateur Night," where the manuscript, as printed in "Everybody's Magazine," ended.

To Miner's Eighth Avenue, Miner's Bowery, The London, The Dewey on East 14th Street, and other burlesque houses where Friday nights were then given to "Amateur Nights," we journeyed from time to time, the finish of this story being the ultimate objective. But other more insistent work always crowded out the possibility of its completion. That is why it remained in "Everybody's" safe for so many years.

With this data before you, and bearing the following points in mind, form your own conclusion about this, my own ending of that story.

The Amateur Night material should be authentic to the last degree.

The title of the story should mean something.

Brevity, an O. Henry gift, should always be considered.

Cliff McGowan should be introduced for a typical O. Henry turn in the climax.

Professional AMATEURS SUPPLIED —
Our artists *always* "GET THE HOOK"
Our fakers are the best.
Comedy — tragedy — dancing — singing,
for Amateur Night
Everything guaranteed a scream!
Our Motto —"The Worst Is None Too Bad."
Author's note — See any vaudeville trade review any time.
Thus, alas, are the poor amateurs commercialized.

T was not this kind of a show. "Cleary's" was the only burlesque house still presenting bona fide amateurs.

Grand-opera patrons, "first-nighter's" and other supporters of Broadway's "high (priced) art" made "Amateur Night" their weekly excuse for a West Side or Bowery slumming trip. A few hundred such in their evening regalia scattered prominently among "Cleary's" regular riff-raff greeted the announcer with a polite patter of white-gloved hands.

"Ladies and gents," he exclaimed, "the foist act will be a song. Miss Ruth Shapely, *sing*-ger."

"Let loose the scream," "Oil her pipes, Jerry," "Now for the big noise," and other similar pleasantries were shouted to encourage the débutante.

She looked all that her name did *not* imply. Built like an elongated Pittsburg stogie, her facial expression resembled that of a suicidal Dutchman who had just lost his taste for beer and cheese.

She struck an attitude, and then a few false notes. It was enough. Trills, roulades, cadenzas, cat-calls and weird whistling effects came from all over the house. The audience had passed

judgment. Another rival for Fritzi Scheff honors had passed in the night.

"Signor Gregori and Madame Vinsuppi, ultra-refined balladists," came next. Gregori, an east-side barber with thoughts of emulating Caruso, made his way ponderously to the center of the stage, followed by his midget-like companion. His three hundred pounds of fat and tissue were very much exaggerated by a hired dress-suit that was two sizes too small for him. Both artists beamed.

"Give the little one a fair chance now, Yousouf," exclaimed some one from the gallery, but the orchestra stilled further comment.

"Oh, the joys of Spring," warbled in a thin light tenor not audible to the greater part of the house was very quickly drowned by the other member of the duo. "Spring! Spring! Spring!" shouted she, with the force of Barnum's steam calliope. It was not a duet; it was an awful noise from the female of the species with soundless muscular facial contortions by her perspiring partner.

"Hey, Rosie, give the big feller a show," and "Back to the boiler factory for yours," failed to disconcert them. The orchestra did the trick. Each instrumentalist played a different popular song. Hurling foreign maledictions at the crowd the two reminders of the Turko-Italio fracas made their get-away.

Dan O'Flanagan, a good-natured Irishman with James Thornton aspirations, followed. A shower of hats descending from the flies above sent Dan back to the trucks.

Maggie O'Sullivan showed that she had come to stay despite the comments of the audience. Her song, "The Angel's Serenade," was interrupted by a stage-hand lowered just in the rear of Maggie, who embraced her. As they ascended a few feet heavenward Maggie decided against going up with the angels, wrenched herself from her captor's grasp and beat it off the stage for Ninth Avenue.

Two local vocalists, a basso who excelled in cracked notes and a soprano who had him beat on the noise proposition, chose "Love Me and the World Is Mine" as their individual numbers.

(This is an institution at Amateur Night. You get it a half dozen times at every performance in all keys and dialects.) Their friends saw to it that they finished the two verses uninterruptedly.

Then came a dancer whose rapid footwork was upset completely by an orchestral accompaniment of Chopin's Funeral March.

A fife and drum corps coming unexpectedly from up stage center proved too much for another vocalist and two other aspirants were quickly chased into the wings with "the hook."

"Mac McGowan, Dancer," announced with a broad grin and a nod of assurance, served to introduce a nattily dressed youth attired in a swell looking summer outfit. (The I. P. System, $2.50 down and 50 cents per week had made the shoes, shirt, suit and hat possible.)

Del Delano joined Junius Rollins in a stage-box. A murmur of recognition passed throughout the auditorium as he seated himself with a self-satisfied smirk.

McGowan, plainly nervous, settled into his work, encouraged by comments from the gang outside. Several minutes had elapsed and "Mac" wasn't "puttin' 'em over," as Delano grumblingly admitted to the booking agent.

"Guess you picked a lemon, Del," yawned Rollins, wiping his dripping triple chin and seeking interest in the audience, which, partisan to the core, applauded every little thing.

"Gee, the kid's using all his own stuff," complained Del. "Why don't he spring 'The Turkey Trot,' 'The Triple Tap,' 'Chantecler with the Pip,' 'The Stuttering Flip,' and all that high-class refined stuff that I showed him?"

Rollins grunted.

"He won't do for the three-a-day, no, nor the four-a-day, let alone for Big Time," he asserted as he prepared to leave.

Mac had ceased dancing and the crowd was applauding wildly. Then came the big surprise. From the left wing, suddenly there appeared what to many was unquestionably a McGowan twin. It was Mac's cousin Cliff, dressed in a duplicate of Mac's I. P. System outfit. With an uneasy start Delano recognized him.

The boys did a "brother act," dancing and singing. As they

warmed to their work, here indeed were revealed all of the great Delano's tricks, but it was Delano outdone for they had "doubled" on him and cousin Cliff out-Delanoed even Del.

They did everything with their feet but talk and that was pretty well suggested in their "Conversational Rag Two-step," The Turkey Trot, Triple Tap, Chantecler with the Pip, Stuttering Flip; all were turned loose to wind up with a competition jig followed by a startling acrobatic exit of the cousins, one right, one left, in a wagon-wheel effect.

The house was a pandemonium of excitement. Again and again were the dancers recalled. Junius Rollins actually beamed. Delano scowled. He was thinking deeply. He sensed the ominous. It came later with a cancelled contract — but we anticipate.

"Ain't it the limit?" queried the once-great Del Delano, as he leaned against the Cadillac bar some months later and gulped down his third whiskey.

He was gazing at a brilliant electric sign reflected in the café mirror from Broadway's leading vaudeville theatre. It read:

Re-Engaged For Third Week. Great Sensation.
THE TWO MACS — THOSE CLEVER KIDS
Best Dancing Act in Vaudeville.

"Here I teach that McGowan kid my best stuff — put him wise to everything and what does he do? Brings that sneaking cousin of his around night after night to get 'hep.'

"'Can Cousin Cliff sit around,' says he, innocent like. 'You know we always travel together.'

"'Sure,' says I; 'let him stick around — maybe he'll learn something.'

"And now they've canned the single dancing turns on 'Big Time' and it's me for the three-a-day while these pirates get away with the big noise at $500 per. Ain't that enough to drive a fellow to the bow-wows?"

"But, Del," interposed one of the bar supporters, who knew all

the facts, "you copped the wrong kid. Mac McGowan, he had the talent, but Cliff McGowan, he was the genius."

TO deal with the South of to-day and to treat with severe condemnation the "professional Southerner" and the non-representative Southern poseurs who, decadent, still live with the Civil War, was the intention of O. Henry when he died. He wished to make a comparison between the useless, shiftless, lazy individual who still lives with the Civil War and blames it for his unfortunate condition in life and the hustling "red-headed producer of results who is so busy making good that he has even forgotten that there was such a thing as the Spanish-American War."

Charles Belmont Davis saw in the idea its big possibilities and contracted, through me, for the series for "Collier's Weekly." But not one ever was finished, although O. Henry had the scheme pretty completely blocked out. The work would have been very difficult and with his limitations, due to ill-health, it was necessary to follow a line of lesser resistance. At this period he did, however, turn out "A Municipal Report" which, while not representing this idea, nevertheless reflected his train of thought.

With the possible exception of Morgan Robertson, it is doubtful if any short-story writer of genius, performing consistently year after year, earned less from his product. Immediate need (and there was always immediate need — and usually for someone else) made necessary "sacrifice prices" for *instant* cash. Books were sold outright for a song (a couple of hundred dollars or less) and short stories for less than their legitimate value. On the other hand many editors were generous with substantial advances on account of stories to be written; and here a tribute should be paid to Frank B. Doubleday, for it was he, who, on taking over the O. Henry works that had been sold outright, volunteered a royalty to be paid in the future, despite the absence of contract or obligation. And that royalty is being sustained to this day and the books, which sold only moderately well dur-

ing the author's lifetime, now run beyond a million copies in the collected edition.

O. Henry viewed the methods of those who advantaged themselves of his desperate need with a humor and philosophy worthy of his greatest fiction productions. How he "put one over" on a certain magazine makes an amusing and interesting story. This periodical had repeatedly driven a hard bargain, even to the extent of re-selling a story so purchased, at profit to itself. It was this action that determined the author's final action. He secured an advance of a couple of hundred dollars against promise to deliver, and he made delivery of just enough pages to compensate for the amount of money received. "There now," said he to me, "that's the last manuscript they will ever get from me!" And it was.

Only seven or eight pages of the tale (some 1500 to 2000 words of what would have been a completed story of 4000 to 5000 words) was delivered.

As he predicted, his end did come "In the Good Old Summer Time," an expression which, coupled with his last words, "I'm Afraid To Go Home in the Dark" (both popular songs at the time), pitifully portray his recognition of the inevitable and his heroic reconciliation to it.

Following a discussion of "going over the line," the result of an attack of illness at the time, he said to me:

"We're both up against it financially, Colonel. But when the Big Show comes off, and I suppose they will make a Big Show of it, just you hire a taxi and you and Jo. breeze down Riverside Drive as though you were millionaires. It'll probably be 'In the Good Old Summer Time' and they'll be wearing top hats and frock coats and all that sort of stuff. That will be uncomfortable. Stick to a straw hat and hock your frock for a taxi."

I did and I didn't. The straw hat was all right but the frock coat was not available. But we breezed down Riverside Drive in a taxi on that glorious June day to "The Little Church Around the Corner" and there were gathered just such a throng as he had predicted.

After the services were completed and the body had been borne away, I looked back for a last glance at the empty pews and beheld a solitary figure, kneeling. It was a woman and she was praying — a woman of the streets whom he had uplifted and set on the right path. He was always doing silent good. That's the reason he never had any money.

FINIS

It would be the desire of O. Henry, I am positive, to give every possible encouragement to so gifted a fellow-master-craftsman as Larry Evans, he who rose above the trial of mind and soul, with the handicap of years of enforced isolation at Saranac Lake imposed on him by ill health. A youth, only now twenty-five years of age, he has produced as a result, a first novel, "Once to Every Man," that is nothing short of inspirational in its optimism and genuine wholesomeness. And, too, such short stories as "Conahan" in *"Hearst's,"* "Father LeFevre" and "The Painted Lady," *"Saturday Evening Post,"* "Cassidy" and "Once When the River Ran White," *"Cosmopolitan,"* "The Man Who Made Believe" and "Faith," *"Metropolitan";* all reflecting the same spirit as "Once to Every Man," which was such a sensational success in the *"Metropolitan"* and now in book form.

At once these productions have earned for him the distinction of being acknowledged by those who really know, as America's young author of greatest promise, and they place him in a class with such important "discoveries" as Rex Beach, Herbert Kaufmann, Katherine Cecil Thurston, Basil King, Rupert Hughes, Frederic Arnold Kummer, and even O. Henry himself, all of whom it was my privilege to be identified with in the exploitation of their first work.

Hence, I have written this booklet, which is not available for purchase, and can only be secured with the novel "Once to Every Man." The publishers, The H. K. Fly Company of New York City, will supply copies of "My Friend O. Henry" free without charge on receipt of the signed blank to be found on the last page of "Once to Every Man."

The end

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